

THE CHURCH AND HER TEACHING

C. H. ROBINSON

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The church and her teaching

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AND HER TEACHING



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ADDRESSES DELIVERED IN CORNWALL

BY THE REV.

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

THE LORD BISHOP OF TRURO

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INTRODUCTION

BY

THE LORD BISHOP OF TRURO.

I HEARTILY introduce this book with a few words of commendation, partly from my high esteem of the author's work in my diocese, and the missionary heroism which is about to take him to the sources of the Niger, and partly from my sympathy with the idea that animates this book.

For the nearest reserves of the strength of the Church lie in the ingathering of the sons and daughters who have left her—those many saintly souls who are working alongside of her, yet outside her communion. We cannot afford to miss the sympathy and partnership of these men ;

they have much grace to give us, and the Church of their fathers must surely have yet more to give them. Both of us have suffered enough from the kingdom divided, while neither can the world believe, nor ourselves be perfected, until our oneness be recovered.

Let repentance be ours ; for, if we had not slept, they had not wandered, nor the enemy sown so many tares in the Church.

And, when they return to their old home, they will find it in a very different condition to that in which they left it. They will find in her altars and pulpits the graces they left her to seek, and the strength and the tenderness which she has inherited from those whom her Lord has made so tender and strong.

Then the faith of Christ our Lord will be powerful against the things that make for evil ; the vices of England will have to reckon with a united Christendom ; our strength will be spent no more against

each other, but it will increase by use against the enemies of God and man.

My friend, who has written these pages, has helped the reunion of English Christendom by showing the Church in its love and zeal all through the outlying villages of Cornwall, as well as by his words in the pulpit of the Cathedral.

May the grace that makes men to be of one mind in the household of God fulfil his words in the hearts of his readers!

JOHN TRURON.

TRURO,

Easter, 1893.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE following addresses, which were delivered in Truro Cathedral during the Friday evenings in Lent, are an attempt to suggest in a popular form the essential points of difference between the teaching of the Church and that of all sects and denominations outside her. The fourth address more especially deals with difficulties suggested to the author during an open-air mission tour which it was his privilege to make in Cornwall during the summers of 1891 and 1892. Apart from the directly evangelistic work which it was the primary object of the mission to accomplish, the close contact with the people into which those who took part in it were brought, afforded an almost unique opportunity of gaining a real insight into the causes which have resulted in the alienation from the

Church of their forefathers of so large a portion of the population of Cornwall. The author and his companions, dressed simply in cassock and cape, walked two and two from village to village, holding open-air preaching services in each, with the approval of the vicar of the parish, and with a direct commission from the Bishop of the diocese. At the close of the evening services they were accustomed to appeal to their audiences to offer them food and lodging for the night ; and whilst accepting the hospitality of their hosts, who were in many cases Nonconformists, they were able to remove not a few prejudices against the Church, which had arisen through ignorance as to the real nature of her teaching. The evident failure of the Church in so many country districts to reach those who are alienated from her, either through indifference or prejudice, together with the encouraging reception accorded to the efforts above referred to, would seem to point to the desirability of an organized attempt being made to inaugurate work on similar lines

elsewhere. Should it ever be found possible to re-establish in England an order of preaching friars, whose object should be to supplement the work of the parochial clergy by open-air and other preaching, and who, starting from some common centre, such as a restored monastery would so naturally afford, should rely for their support upon the hospitality of the people, it seems probable that a revival of religion might be thereby promoted in no way less remarkable than that of the thirteenth century.

A further need, which appears to the author to be of even more pressing importance in Cornwall at the present time, is this. There are many country parishes containing outlying hamlets distant from the parish church from one to three miles, in which no Church service is held from the beginning of the year to the end. The income attached to the parish is perhaps £120 or £150 per annum, no further support of any kind being obtainable either for a curate or a lay-reader. The only religious

services which are held in these hamlets are conducted by Dissenting "local preachers," who are plain working men, and receive no remuneration. It was strongly impressed upon the author, during his peregrinating mission work, that the Church could take no more effective step to recover the influence which she has lost, than by organizing a band of "Church local preachers," who should be communicant members of the Church, but should be simple working men, willing to give their services without payment, and to preach in cottages, barns, or schoolrooms throughout a given circuit, which should include five or six adjacent parishes. The success which has attended the partial realization of such a scheme in the neighbourhood of Bishop Auckland, would seem to point to the possibility of developing the same on a far wider scale such as that suggested.

The publication of these addresses is in part due to a desire expressed by several of those who heard them that they might

have them in a permanent form ; in part also to the fact that they may not probably be the last addresses that the author will have the opportunity of giving in Cornwall, as he is about to leave England in order to attempt a journey of missionary exploration across the Sahara Desert and the Western Soudan. The proposed journey will be in connection with the recently formed Hausa Association, to which will be given any profits arising from the sale of this volume. The author would desire to express his indebtedness for help received from his brother, Rev. A. W. Robinson, especially in the first three addresses.

C. H. R.

TRURO,

Easter, 1893.



I.

AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FAITH
—WHENCE IS IT DERIVED?

“They received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”—
ACTS xvii. 11.

THE object which we shall try to keep before us during these addresses on the Friday evenings in Lent is suggested to us by the words which we have just read. We shall try to consider some of the most distinctive points in the teaching of the Church of England, in order to place, as it were, in the hands of a Churchman a simple but intelligent answer to the question, “Why should I as a matter of principle remain in the Church of England in preference to attaching myself to one of the now almost countless sects outside that Church?”

We shall earnestly endeavour to avoid ap-

proaching the subject in any spirit of controversy, our object being not to convert those outside the Church, but to help those already in it to know the certainty of those things wherein they have been instructed. The object which we desire to set before us is a definitely practical one—we desire to find out what there is in the distinctive teaching of our Church which should be of real help to us in our struggle against sin.

The first of the subjects which we propose to consider is, "Authority in matters of faith;" or, in other words, the source from which we obtain that which we believe. There is a well-known statement, by the late Dean Hook, to which I would like to draw your attention, "*We receive our religion from the Church, we prove it from the Bible.*" Is this a statement which as members of the Church of England we should be prepared to accept or indorse? Before giving a definite answer to this question, let us consider the statement in its separate clauses.

"*We receive our religion.*" This, at any rate, no one would be prepared to deny; our religion is not the result of our own invention or discovery; it existed long before we were born.

We receive our religion, then ; but whence, or from whom ? "From the Bible," many voices would seem to reply. Is this so ? Had you no knowledge whatever of religion until you were old enough to read the Bible or to understand it when read to you ? Surely not ; you received your religion at the earliest dawn of your conscious life, from your mother, from the hymns which you learnt or listened to, from your clergyman or minister. "But mine is the religion of the Bible," you will say ; "I can soon prove this." Quite so, but that is a different point altogether. You received it, notwithstanding, not directly from the Bible, but from some human teacher or teachers.

Let us pass on to the next clause. "*We prove it from the Bible.*" Here, too, all are agreed. The Calvinist says, "Read the Bible and you will become a Calvinist ;" the Baptist, "Read the Bible and you will become a Baptist ;" the Presbyterian, "Read the Bible and you will become a Presbyterian." Nor are these all. In 1851 there were ninety-five so-called Protestant denominations ; to-day the number is just short of three hundred, nor is there any likelihood of the number decreasing. What are we to say to

this fact? What are those outside saying? The atheist points the finger of scorn at the ever-increasing number to which we have referred, and says, "When you Christians have agreed as to the meaning of your Bible, we shall be prepared to listen." The Romanist obtains an unanswerable argument in support of his own system of teaching, as he points to these three hundred sects, and says, "This is the result of your Protestantism!" The practical and obvious result is that the followers of Christ to-day are like the fragments of a disorganized army, the separate battalions of which refuse to conform to any single system or to adopt any uniform plan.

In St. John xvii. 20, Christ foretells that the exact opposite to this, viz. the unity of the Christian Church, would be the condition of the world's conversion. "I pray for them also which shall believe on Me . . . that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe . . ." Here, and by no uncertain hint, we have explained to us the cause of the comparative failure of modern Christianity.

What, then, is the remedy to be suggested?

There are two remedies on which I wish to

say a few words to-night. The first is what is often spoken of as "*undenominationalism.*" There are many very good people, who, weary of the unceasing strife between sect and sect, are saying, "Let us try to find out the essential truths which are held alike by all denominations, and let us take our stand on these truths alone, and invite all to accept this as a basis of union." Such a scheme or proposal seems at first sight so plausible that it is little wonder that many are found ready to adopt it. And yet if we look more carefully at it we shall, I think, see that, great as the evil of disunion undoubtedly is, the remedy proposed is even worse than the evil itself.

Viewed in the light of experience, what does undenominationalism really mean? Does it mean the union or fusion of other sects, or does it not rather mean the addition of one to their number?

The worst and most fatal objection, however, is this, that to become undenominational we must be prepared to give up at least two-thirds of the Bible; for if we decide to retain as essential truth only that on which everybody is agreed, we shall find that little indeed of our

Bible is left to us. However greatly we may desire to see the reunion of Christ's Church, we cannot, we dare not, give up the very smallest part of God's written revelation, or leave it to man to decide what is or what is not "essential truth."

But there is *yet another remedy* which it is possible to suggest. Let us picture to ourselves a Churchman standing amidst a group of representatives of the three hundred denominations with Bible and Prayer-book in his hand. He opens his Prayer-book, and begins to read from the twentieth article, "The Church hath authority in controversies of faith ;" at this point we can imagine his being interrupted by a storm of disapprobation, as one and another exclaims, "We want not the Church, but the Bible!" As soon as he can obtain a hearing, he begins to explain to them that which we have been considering together this evening ; he shows how the principle suggested by the words, "we receive our religion from the Church," is true not only of the Church but of all denominations alike. As he turns from one to another in the crowd before him, he says, "You each receive your religion from some recognized teacher ; you

each appeal to the Bible to prove what you have received. You Calvinists, *e.g.*, receive your religion from John Calvin, you Presbyterians from John Knox, you Wesleyans from John Wesley. We Churchmen receive our religion not from any one teacher, but from the Church ; she is our teacher. Nor is she any upstart of yesterday ; it was for her that the Reformers gave their lives, both before and since which her articles have been subscribed by tens of thousands of good and holy men." He would then proceed to explain that, great as was his respect for the names he had mentioned before, it could not compare with, still less outweigh, the respect claimed from him by the long list of names of those who had belonged to his Church from the very earliest centuries down to the present day.

He would then go on with the words of his article, "And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written." Herein, as he would explain, lies the difference between the Church of England and that of Rome, which claims from its members absolute unquestioning obedience, and refuses to allow her individual members to

appeal from her teaching to that of the Bible. The principle on which the Church of England acts is the exact opposite : she it was who first gave the people of England the Bible in their own tongue ; she reads to-day more Scripture than any other body ; no less than two-thirds of her services consist of Scripture.

The authority which the Church claims is "educational authority ;" she asks a patient and respectful hearing, and then says to those who have received her teaching, "Go, take the religion which you have received, and prove it for yourself from the Bible." If we look at the words of our text, we shall see that those here referred to, whose action is commended, did not search the Bible to discover *what* they were to believe, but to prove the correctness of that which they had already received. We are not unfrequently confronted with an objection to the Church such as this : "I do not accept any authority ; I read my Bible for myself, and go by it." Let us imagine a principle such as this applied to any other branch of knowledge. Suppose, for example, that any one desirous of studying astronomy were to say, "I will not allow my mind to be prejudiced by any know-

ledge which has been accumulated in the past ; I will start afresh for myself from the very beginning." What would the inevitable result be? It is conceivable that a very clever boy, after constructing a telescope for himself, might, in the course of a long life, discover the fact that the planets go round the sun, but it is more than possible that he would not get even as far as this. If, then, it would be such manifest folly to apply this principle to any other branch of knowledge, is it not something worse than folly to apply it to the highest and most important branch of all?

To sum up, then, in a single sentence the difference between Nonconformists and Churchmen—they receive their religion from different teachers, we from the Church, the difference being simply in regard to the teacher chosen. The presumption, however, in favour of the Church (with its long succession of teachers, saints, and heroes) as against any one individual teacher is surely overwhelming. The question which still remains for consideration is whether her claim to teach in harmony with the Bible can be sustained. Next time we shall endeavour to see what exactly her distinctive teaching is,

and on the following Friday shall go on to test its claim to be in harmony with the Bible. Meanwhile let us pray that God may grant to us a more teachable mind, a more earnest desire to submit ourselves to the guidance of His Holy Spirit, which was expressly promised to guide us into all truth, and an ever-increasing determination to avoid prolonging or increasing by any action of our own the present disunion in Christ's Body—His Church.

II.

THE CHURCH'S FIRST LESSON-BOOK.

“I have loved thee with an everlasting love . . . for I am a Father.”—JER. xxxi. 3, 9.

LAST Friday evening we examined at some length the statement of the late Dean Hook, “We receive our religion from the Church, we prove it from the Bible ;” we saw how, with the variation of a single word, the statement is true not only of the Church but of all sects and denominations, the difference between a Churchman and a Nonconformist here being not one of principle but of detail. Both alike receive their religion from some one or more teachers, both alike endeavour to prove from the Bible the truth of what they have received, the point at issue being simply what teacher is the best.

The Churchman says, “Believing as I do that truth is too vast to be grasped in its en-

tirety by any single mind, I accept as my teacher no individual, however learned and good he may have been, but a body or succession of men. Moreover, I believe that inasmuch as Christ's promise to His followers that the Spirit should be given to guide them into all truth cannot have failed of its fulfilment, therefore the Church, as organized by them and by their immediate successors, is more likely to be a safe guide than any recent or comparatively recent organization can be. Hence I believe that the Reformed Church of England, whose professed object is to reproduce the teaching and customs of the Early Church, whilst discarding all mediæval additions thereto, is likely to be the surest and best guide which exists for me to-day. Still, I do not accept her teaching blindly; she bids me search the Scriptures in order to prove for myself the truth of what she tells me, and this I am prepared to do." Such, then, is the position which a Churchman of to-day might be supposed to assume. Before, however, we can do as we have suggested, viz. submit the teaching which we have received to the test of Scripture, we must first be quite clear as to what that teaching is. More than

half the difficulties which people feel in regard to the Church arise from a misunderstanding, or at any rate from an imperfect understanding, as to what her teaching really is. In order to gain for ourselves the clearest possible conception of what she would wish us to understand, we cannot do better than turn for a moment to what has rightly been termed "*the Church's first lesson-book*," I mean the Church Catechism. Drawn up originally in the reign of Edward VI., in view of the prevailing ignorance of the times, it expresses, in language so simple that a child can understand, some of the deepest and most wonderful truths of the Christian revelation. George Herbert has said that all Divinity could easily be reduced to the Church Catechism.

We cannot now attempt any detailed examination of its teaching; all that we can do, and all that is needful for our present purpose to do, is to grasp the underlying principles which run through it all.

The one leading idea which we may trace throughout the whole, in so far as we can express it in a single sentence, is this: the first step in religion consists not in doing anything for God, but in believing what He has done for

man. To understand this better, let us compare the opening words of the Scotch Catechism with those of our own. It begins with the question, "What is the chief end of man?" the answer being, "To glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." True and noble words, no doubt; but many of us will feel that they cannot but prefer the order adopted by our own Catechism, according to which the child is first taught that he is a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, and then, having duly learned his privileges, is reminded of the responsibilities which these privileges entail. The Church's teaching as expressed in the Catechism is that it is impossible for any one to love or serve God who has not first understood and believed the existence of God's love towards himself; in accordance with this principle we find that the Creed is here placed before the Commandments; "bound to believe" comes before "bound to do," blessings before duties, privileges before responsibilities. It may be urged that this truth is not peculiar to our Church Catechism; but whereas it is to be found partially and incidentally elsewhere, it here forms the basis on which

the whole of the after-teaching is made to depend.

To pass on, then, to what is still more distinctive of the teaching of the Church of England. There are many who would perhaps be disposed to say, "Yes, I agree with the teaching of the Church and of the Catechism thus far, but what about its statements in regard to *Baptism*? that is where my difficulty lies." Let us see, then, what the teaching of our Church on the subject of Baptism really is. We shall best understand its significance by taking an illustration suggested by actual experience. A man comes to us, we will suppose, seeking for guidance and help in order to enable him to lead a definitely religious life; in answer to his appeal for direction, we say to him in the spirit of our Church's teaching, "If you would live as a child of God should live, you must begin by believing that God is your Father; this is the first step in the Christian life, until you have taken which all progress is impossible." Supposing him then to reply, "Is it really true that God is my Father, and that I am His child, for if it is not true I cannot believe it in order that my doing so may make it true?"

How is a difficulty such as this, which all who have had anything to do with mission work know to be a very common one indeed, to be met? Various answers have been given from time to time by the different denominations outside the Church, the majority of which would agree in saying that a man is not the child of God in the full meaning of the word until his believing that he is has made him so. In other words, we are bidden to believe a statement which is not necessarily true, but which will become so as we believe it. We can well understand how teaching such as this must tend to confuse the mind of the earnest seeker after truth, and still more that of the little child.

What, then, is the answer which the Church has to give to the question which we have suggested? Whether that answer be right or wrong, it is at least clear and unmistakable. In reply to the question, "Is it true that I am the child of God even before I believe?" she would say, "Yes, it is true; you have a position as such, or I would not ask you to believe in it. Your faith does not create anything; it simply claims the privileges which, in virtue of your baptism, are already yours, and appro-

priates the blessings which those privileges were intended to secure."

The distinctive teaching of the Church in regard to this is seen most clearly in the explanation which the Catechism gives of the Creed. In answer to the question, "What dost thou chiefly learn by these articles of thy belief?" the child is taught to recognize the existence of *three different circles in the Creed* one within the other, in the innermost of which he has right to claim a place in virtue of his baptism. The actual words as they occur in the Catechism are these: "First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me, and all the world." Here we have the outermost circle of all, embracing even inanimate nature, into which we are admitted by creation. "Secondly," so the answer goes on, "in God the Son, who hath redeemed me, and all mankind." Here we have a circle, wide indeed, but not so wide as the first, into which we are admitted by virtue of Christ's atonement for the sins of the whole world. Yet, once more we read, "Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God." Here we have the innermost circle of all, an

elect people or Church chosen out from the rest of mankind, into which we are admitted by baptism.

This, then, is one of the most distinctive points of difference between the teaching of the Church and that of all other bodies outside her communion ; she says to each of her members, "You are the possessor in virtue of your baptism of wondrous privileges ; you are a child in God's family, a member of Christ's Body, *i.e.* His Church, and a citizen of His Kingdom. Claim these privileges by faith, and they will bring to you the blessings they were intended to secure." If we accept this teaching, we may go to all those who have been baptized, even though they have forgotten the fact and are living in selfishness and sin, and we may say to them, "God is your Father and loves you, and will continue to love you with more than an earthly father's love ; though like the prodigal you have wandered into the far country, He is waiting, nay, longing to receive you back to Himself, provided only you are prepared to live up to the privileges which as a child of God you possess."

This, in briefest outline, is the teaching of the

Church to all her baptized members. Had we time we could easily show how this, too, is the teaching of the Prayer-book; how all her prayers (even as the Lord's Prayer itself, with which her service originally commenced) presuppose the fact that the worshippers occupy the position of children in relation to a father.

Our subject next time will be "The teaching tested," in the light both of Scripture and of practical experience; for this latter is a test ordained by Christ Himself when, speaking concerning false teachers, He said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." If it can be shown that the inevitable, or at least the natural, tendency of this teaching is to encourage careless living, or to make men think lightly of the change which takes place in conversion, or of the necessity for such change, then shall we be constrained to say, this teaching cannot be of God. But if it should appear that the very opposite is the case, and if, moreover, we can show that the principle which underlies this teaching is one which underlies the whole of the Old Testament revelation, and which formed the ground of appeal to the unbelieving as made by each successive prophet, then, instead of

rejecting or explaining away the teaching which we have received from the Church, we shall rather unite in thanking God who has preserved to us, amidst all the changes of the centuries that are past, at least one unchanging witness to the "truth once for all delivered unto the saints."

III.

THE TEACHING TESTED.

“ In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body.”— I COR. xii. 13 (R.V.).

THE subject which we considered together on the first Friday evening in Lent was the nature of the authority which the Church claims as a teacher ; last Friday we advanced a step further, and endeavoured to gather from the Catechism what the distinctive characteristics of that teaching were. To-night we shall try to submit this teaching to the test, first of the Bible, and secondly of practical experience, for, as we said last time, unless it can satisfy this double test we shall find it impossible to accept with unwavering confidence the claims which it makes upon us. If, on the one hand, it should appear that although, as judged by visible results, the teaching of the Catechism seems to warrant our acceptance, it nevertheless fails to

find support—we will not say from individual texts, for no heresy, whether in ancient or modern time, has ever failed to quote isolated texts in its defence, but—from the general tenor of revelation both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, then, no matter how venerable or ancient the tradition by which it is supported, its failure to satisfy this supreme test must compel us to reject altogether its claim upon our acceptance. Or, again, supposing it should appear that, notwithstanding its apparent harmony with the general tenor of revelation, it tends to produce harmful and untrue results as seen in actual life, then shall we be forced to suspect that the method of interpretation by which we arrived at the conclusion that the teaching was in accordance with Scripture must itself be at fault.

In order to submit the teaching to the test we have proposed, we must, at the risk of some slight repetition, sum up the results at which we arrived last time. We saw then that the difference between the teaching of the Catechism and much of the teaching of to-day outside the Church, is that whereas such popular Christianity would say to those to whom it addresses itself,

“You are the child of the devil, you may become the child of God,” the Catechism would say the exact opposite, “You are the child of God, you may become the child of the devil.” We saw, moreover, how in its explanation of the Creed the Catechism teaches us to recognize the existence of three distinct classes or circles, the first embracing animate and inanimate nature alike, the second the whole human race, and the third composed of an elect people or society chosen out from all the rest of mankind ; admission into this innermost circle being granted quite apart from any personal merit on the part of the recipient, but simply on the ground and as the result of obedience to a definite command given by the original Founder of the society. The point which we shall try to consider to-night is whether or not this teaching is in harmony with the whole spirit of the divine revelation alike in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Do God’s dealings with men in the past afford any parallel to what we must suppose His dealings with them in the present to be, if this teaching as to an elect people, an inner circle, and a visible rite of admission to the same, be really true ?

Does the Bible, for instance, give us any hint that before the Christian Church came into existence, God selected by an apparently arbitrary choice a particular people who were marked off from all others by an outward rite or ceremony, in order that they might be the recipients of special favours and blessings? The answer to this question is so obvious that we need scarcely stop to suggest it. More than half our Bible is given up exclusively to the history of just such a society or people. We read in the Old Testament how God in ancient times chose out one particular race utterly insignificant in power and in number amongst the nations of the world, and, as their after-history showed, possessing few if any distinctive virtues, but capable of all the worst vices practised by the heathen from amongst whom they were chosen; and how the members of this race were marked off from infancy by an outward rite or ceremony intended to remind them that they were a peculiar people, the possessors of privileges and the heirs of promised blessings which had been granted to them alone. Nor is it difficult for us to understand the object which it was hereby intended

to secure. Prior to the selection of this race, the divine revelation which had been granted to single individuals, *e.g.* to Enoch and to Noah, had failed to produce any definite or lasting impression upon the world owing to the absence of any principle of continuity in connection with the same. It is, indeed, a fact to which the history of all religions alike bears witness, that truth, in order to win its way in the world, needs not only to be embodied, but needs to be embodied in some permanent form. The influence of any single individual upon the world, no matter how true and noble it may be, is, in consequence of the inevitable limitations to which he is subject, an influence which tends to pass away as soon as his personality is withdrawn. If the knowledge of God were to be spread throughout the world, it was necessary that in some way or other permanence and continuity should be given to the gradually unfolding revelation. Hence it was, as we may fairly assume, that one man was singled out who should learn and do the truth himself, and then teach it to those under his charge, to his family, who in turn should transmit the same to their descendants. Thus we read in Gen.

xviii. 19 (R.V.), "I have known him, to the end that he may command his children . . . after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord." The principle according to which a particular people were selected to be the medium by which the truth, revealed in the first instance to them alone, should be preserved and given forth to the world, is a principle which characterizes the whole of God's dealings in the Old Testament from the time of Abraham onwards. The question then arises, as we pass from the Old Testament revelation to the New, Is there anything to lead us to suppose that the whole method and principle of God's dealings with men prior to the coming of Christ was then reversed? Or, is it not rather the fact that the writers of the New Testament, who had all been trained as members of this earlier Jewish Church, take pains to assure us that although those originally chosen have been temporally rejected, the continuity of the Christian Church with the Jewish is in no wise affected thereby? The Epistle to the Hebrews was written for this express purpose, viz. to contradict the supposition that any break had occurred in the divine revelation or in the method of its mani-

festation. We said that the essential point of difference between the teaching of our Church to-day, and that of all other bodies of Christians, is briefly this, that we Churchmen believe that ever since the Day of Pentecost God has chosen out a visible Society, admission into which is obtained by the outward rite of baptism, and has assured to all members of this Society, quite irrespective of any personal merit, privileges and blessings far exceeding those given to the world at large. If, then, as we believe, the study both of the Old Testament and of the New serves to establish the fact that teaching such as this is in entire harmony with all God's dealings with men in the past, and if, moreover, it can be shown that this teaching was accepted without question by every branch of the Christian Church for the first fifteen hundred years after its formation, we shall feel it ever more and more impossible to abandon the same in favour of any private interpretation of Scripture, whether our own or that of any one else. But here we are not unlikely to be met with a difficulty such as this : there are many who would be disposed to agree with what has been said concerning the Jewish Church and with the fact that the Chris-

tian Church was intended to be a continuation of the same, but who would say to us, "The Church in the existence of which I believe, is not a visible society such as you describe, but is *an invisible Church*, composed of Christians belonging to all sects and bodies scattered throughout the world; surely," such an one would argue, "the Church of Christ must be a pure and spotless Church, and cannot possibly be identified with that of which you speak, and which, as you would yourself admit, is so far from being perfect that it contains amongst its members many who are utterly unworthy of the name Christian." We shall obtain our truest solution to a difficulty such as this by referring once again to the Bible, considering as we did before, not so much statements to be obtained from individual texts, which if taken apart from their context may often mislead us, but the whole spirit and tenor of revelation. The difficulty before us is briefly this: Can a Church which has so many blemishes, and contains so many unworthy members as the Church of England does, claim to represent in any real sense the Church which Christ came to found? or, do not these admitted shortcomings in our

Church render such identification impossible? Turning to the history contained in the Bible, do we find that the original Jewish Church was without spot or blemish, or that it contained within it no unworthy members? or do we read anywhere in the Old Testament of an invisible body as separate and distinct from the outward and visible Church? Surely not. Passing, then, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, do we find that the nucleus of the Christian Church, even when that nucleus consisted of but twelve persons, was free from all blemish, or that it included no unworthy member? Or, to refer to a later period when the organization of the Church was more fully developed, do we find that the Church at Corinth—those, *e.g.*, of whom St. Paul speaks in the words of our text when he says, “In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body”—was composed only of Christians worthy of the name? So far was this from being the case, that no Church of which we read in the New Testament was so full of contention and of evil, and yet St. Paul did not say to them, as he would naturally have done had he believed in the existence of an invisible Church such as

we have described, "Because this is so, therefore ye are no longer members of Christ's Church;" on the contrary, he urged upon them the fact that in virtue of their baptism they were members of Christ's Body as the very reason why they should strive to rise to a higher standard and to put away the evil from amongst them. Had we time, we might show how the argument which St. Paul here uses recurs again and again throughout the New Testament, whereas the doctrine of an invisible Church, as opposed to an organized and visible one, is not only unsupported by the history of the New Testament, but is opposed to the whole spirit of its teaching. This doctrine was apparently first suggested towards the end of the second century by an heretical sect called Montanists who lived in North Africa, and who were regarded as excommunicate by the whole Christian Church on the ground that their teaching was opposed to that of Scripture. After being revived in a modified form by another heretical sect in the fourth century called Donatists, it appears to have died out, till, like so many of the heresies which troubled the early Church, it was revived again within

comparatively recent time. We can but trust that a more careful study both of the Jewish and Christian Church as described in the Old and in the New Testament may lead to its disappearance as before.

So far we have been engaged in endeavouring to submit the distinctive teaching of the Church to the test of Scripture; it has yet to be seen as to whether or not it can stand the second suggested test, viz. that of practical experience. It is sometimes urged by those who are unable to accept the teaching of the Church that such teaching, even if it were true, would inevitably tend to encourage carelessness of living. They would have us refrain from telling a man who was living in sin that he is a child of God for fear lest such an assurance should encourage him to continue as he is; they would rather bid us urge upon him the fact of his estrangement from God, in order that he may be thereby the more easily induced to seek to gain for himself the privileges of sonship. But surely the result which we are thus bidden to guard against would arise not from the teaching of Church principles, but from a total misunderstanding of what those principles are. It was not the

belief that he had ceased to be a son which induced the prodigal to return, but it was the conviction of the exact opposite; it was the knowledge that despite all his sin he had still a Father to whom he might return that emboldened him to do so.

Finally, to suggest the most certain of all tests, would we discover what the real tendency of such teaching is, let us not simply rely upon the experience of others, but let us resolve, if we have not already done so, to test it by our own. Let us determine that from this time forth we will believe and act as though it were true, that God is indeed our Father, and, acknowledging ourselves as His children, claim from Him the power to live as His children should. We shall thus find that, so far from such a belief acting as an incentive to carelessness of living, our power to conquer sin will ever bear an exact proportion to our determination to act on the assumption that such a belief is true.

IV.

OBJECTIONS TO THE CHURCH.

“Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”—JER. vi. 16.

IN passing on to the consideration of “Objections to the Church,” which we have chosen as our subject for to-night, we would like to repeat what we said at the beginning of this course, that our object is not so much to suggest answers to objections which might be raised from a controversial point of view by those outside the Church, but rather to attempt the solution of difficulties such as may from time to time arise in the minds of those who are already by conviction members of the Church.

One of the commonest and, at the same time, most serious difficulties which is likely to suggest itself, especially here in Cornwall, would find expression in words such as these: “If the teach-

ing of the Church that we are made children of God in baptism be really true, what place is there left for the doctrine of *conversion*? Does not the belief in the one necessarily involve the rejection of the other?" The difficulty which this question suggests is no imaginary one, whilst at the same time it is one which, if left unanswered, might well cause us to hesitate before accepting the teaching of the Catechism; for the doctrine of conversion is itself a doctrine of such supreme importance that we may be justly apprehensive of any teaching which might seem to rob it of its significance.

Before endeavouring to see what exactly the relationship between baptism and conversion is, let us be quite clear in our minds as to what we mean by conversion. The word is used in two quite distinct senses, the one implying an all-important truth, the other a perversion of that truth against which we do well to be on our guard. In mission work here in Cornwall, it is not an unfrequent occurrence to have a man pointed out who, it may be, is leading a careless and selfish life, and to be told that such an one has been converted perhaps as many as six

times. What does a case like this imply? Does it not imply that the word has been perverted to an altogether wrong use ; that on each several occasion on which conversion was supposed to have occurred, a strong but passing wave of feeling or emotion was accepted both by teacher and taught as evidence of a change to which the life and character bore no corresponding witness? We cannot too constantly remind ourselves that conversion is a question of will, and not of feeling. Feeling saved is itself no proof whatever of being converted, the highest, the only real proof of which is to be found in the answer to the question, "Am I at this present moment willing and actively determined to carry out what I believe to be God's will in my daily life?" If we cannot truthfully answer "yes" to this question, it can surely be of no avail to plead that on some past occasion in our lives we have been the subject of strong religious feelings ; for such experiences, if real, would serve but to increase our responsibility, and render us the more to blame for not leading a corresponding life.

Before passing on to consider more directly the bearing of the doctrine of baptism on that

of conversion, it might be well to allude to a difficulty which has from time to time been a cause of distress to many earnest Christians, who are miserable because they cannot fix the exact day or hour when their conversion occurred, and are tempted to doubt its reality in consequence. If, as we have said, conversion is dependent upon the will, and not on the emotions, we see how unreasonable such a ground for fear must be. Imagine a man refusing to believe that the sun is shining around him because he did not happen to have seen it rise, and you will then have an illustration of what he is doing who refuses to believe in the forgiveness of his sins and of his conversion to God merely because he cannot fix the exact time when such a state commenced. If we may certainly know that the sun is shining without having seen it rise, we may equally know that the Sun of Righteousness has arisen in our hearts without being able to fix the exact time when we first allowed its rays to enter.

To pass on, then, to the question, What is the connection which exists, or ought to exist, between baptism and conversion? May we

not say that the first is that which makes it possible to expect the occurrence of the second? By the first, viz. baptism, the child is assured of his position as a member of God's family; by the second, viz. conversion, he appropriates to himself the blessings assured to him in his baptism, but which if left unappropriated by the action of his will would eventually have been lost. To refer once again to the parable of the prodigal son, his conversion, if we may so speak, occurred at the moment of his return to his father; but it was the knowledge that he had still a father to whom he might return (the knowledge which since the institution of the Christian Church is secured to us by baptism) which made such conversion possible. Whilst we would not go so far as to say that no unbaptized person can be converted, we would nevertheless regard the fact that a person had been baptized, and so brought into covenant relation with God, as providing the strongest argument with which to appeal to the unconverted, and at the same time as affording the surest ground for expecting that an appeal so made should be successful. So far is it from being the case that the teaching of the Church

in regard to baptism tends to disparage the importance of conversion, that it is only as we learn to understand the former that we shall be in a position to appreciate the significance of the latter.

The *second* of the "Objections to the Church" to which we would wish to refer to-night is one which is chiefly felt by those who are comparatively unfamiliar with our Church's services. Such would be disposed to say to us, "If you read your prayers out of a printed book, how can you expect that they will be as sincere or as helpful to others as they would be if they were the spontaneous expression of the feelings and desires of the individual by whom they are offered? Would it not be well to modify your Church's service at least so far as to leave to the choice of the individual minister the prayers which he is to repeat, and would it not at the same time be possible so to remodel the order of your service as to give to the reading of the Bible a greater prominence than it now has?" There are two different points of view from which we may approach the discussion of this difficulty; the first is what we might call the historical, and the second the practical point of

view. As far back as the history of the Christian Church extends, that is to within a few years of the time of the Apostles themselves, the Church has had a fixed and regular form of service, a form corresponding in all essential particulars to that which we find in our English Prayer-book. In adopting, therefore, the words which the Church puts into our mouths to-day, we are adopting the prayers and praises which have been used by countless thousands of the best and holiest men who have lived during the centuries that are passed, and are thereby uniting ourselves in spirit to all those who were once members like ourselves of the Church militant, but are now members of the Church whose warfare is accomplished. Were there no other argument in favour of the Church's liturgy to suggest, the knowledge that probably every single prayer has been hallowed by association with the experience of some saint or hero of the past might well cause us to hesitate before consenting to disinherit ourselves of the legacy which our forefathers have bequeathed to us.

Again, to approach the question from the point of view suggested by practical experience,

one advantage which the Churchman secures by his adoption of a fixed liturgy is, that he is thus rendered independent of any shortcomings or deficiencies on the part of his own clergy. Wherever he may chance to find himself, whether it be in England or America, in India or Australia, he knows before entering the church that, no matter how uneducated or unsatisfactory the minister may be, no matter how uninteresting the sermon, he will nevertheless have the opportunity afforded him of taking part in the very same service which many thousands, if not millions, of fellow-worshippers are offering to God elsewhere, it may be at that very hour. Even if prevented from being present at church, he is not thereby debarred from the privilege of this common worship, for as he repeats the service in his own home he knows that the prayers and praises which he utters, hallowed as they are by countless associations with the past, form an invisible but none the less real bond of union between himself and the whole Christian Church scattered throughout the world.

Passing on, then, to the latter part of the suggestion referred to above, viz. that the read-

ing of the Bible should be given a greater prominence in our services than is at present the case, the difficulty which such a suggestion implies is one which can best be dispelled by increased familiarity with the service itself. Though to an occasional attendant it may sometimes appear that the Church has sacrificed to her love of uniformity the advantages to be derived from constant change and variety, the regular worshipper ere long discovers that this is so far from being the case in reality, that although the Church has two appointed services for every day in the year, no two of these are ever alike, nearly half of each service varying from day to day ; he furthermore discovers that so great is the prominence given to the Bible in the Church's order of service (compared, *e.g.*, with that of any other body of Christians outside her), that whilst the greater part of the Old Testament is read once, the New Testament is read no less than twice, in the course of each year.

There is still a *third objection* to the Church which, alike from its prevalence and its importance, is deserving of our consideration to-night. There are many who would perhaps be willing

to admit that the Church teaches nothing directly contrary to Scripture, who would nevertheless feel scruples as to whether she has not added to the teaching of Scripture doctrines which, to say the least, cannot be certainly proved therefrom. As an instance of what they mean, they would point to the teaching of the Church in regard to Confirmation, and ask, "How is it possible to reconcile the importance which the Church attaches to Confirmation as a means whereby the Holy Spirit may be received, with the comparatively few references which are to be found to it in the New Testament?" To answer such a question at all fully would require a much longer consideration than it is possible for us to give to it now. Though we are very far indeed from admitting that the principle of Confirmation is not to be found in the New Testament, let us suppose for a moment that such were the case; how, then, should we deal with the objection that the Church has added to the teaching of the New Testament that which, on this assumption, is incapable of being proved therefrom. The answer which we would make is briefly this. Whether or not any reasonable doubt can arise as to the existence

of Confirmation before the writing of the New Testament was completed, no doubt whatever exists that within a century of that time Confirmation was regularly taught and practised in the Early Church. Thus Tertullian, who wrote before the end of the second century, says, "The hand is laid upon us in benediction invoking and inviting the Holy Ghost . . . then that most Holy Spirit comes down willingly from the Father upon the bodies which have been cleansed and blessed."¹ To give but one more illustration, Clement of Alexandria, who was born within about fifty years of the death of St. John, not only speaks of Confirmation as existing in his own day, but clearly implies that it had so existed even from the very start of the Christian Church.² Had we time we might go on to show that Confirmation, in no essential respect different from that which our Church teaches to-day, was both taught and practised throughout the whole Church, scattered as it was throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa. No one, probably, who has studied the works of the

¹ Tert. de Baptismo, § 5.

² Cf. "Relation of Confirmation to Baptism," A. J. Mason, p. 269.

early Christian writers would deny that the custom of Confirmation, whether apart from or in connection with baptism, was thus unanimously accepted in early time ; nor, again, would any one be disposed to deny that the doctrine of Confirmation is one which has a most direct and important bearing upon the Christian life. If, therefore, we adopt the conclusion that this doctrine of Confirmation is an addition to Scripture, and contrary to the spirit of Christ's teaching, let us at any rate clearly understand what such a conclusion involves. We believe, on the authority of the New Testament, that before Christ left the world He made a distinct promise to His followers that the Holy Spirit should be given to guide them into all truth. If, therefore, the doctrine of Confirmation be contrary to the Spirit of Christ, we are forced to accept the conclusion that, so far from this promise having been fulfilled, the whole Christian Church, for a space of fifteen hundred years, was guided into distinct error on one of the most important possible questions connected with its life and organization. Within recent years there have been, as we know, many attempts made to cast doubt upon the inspiration and truth of

the Bible, but surely no argument derived from supposed historical or scientific misstatements would be half so fatal to its claims as the argument which this conclusion as to the non-fulfilment of Christ's own promise must necessarily supply. The admission that on so vital a point as the means by which the Holy Spirit might be obtained, the whole Church had been allowed to lapse into complete error, would indeed provide an argument against the inspiration of the New Testament to which no apology for Christianity that has ever been written could furnish a reply.

Finally, in regard to the objections which we have already considered, and others which may from time to time be suggested, we cannot do better than repeat the suggestion of Bishop Beveridge, in view of the objections to the Church current in his own day: "Let any one that hath a due sense of religion, and a real desire of happiness, make trial of our Church but for one year; let him constantly read the Scriptures in the method that she prescribes; let him constantly use the Common Prayer according to her directions; let him observe all her Fasts and Holy Days; let him receive the

sacrament as often as she is ready to administer it, and perform whatever else she hath been pleased to command. Let any man, I say, do this, and then let him be against our Church, if he can. I am confident he cannot. But our misery is that none of those who are out of the Church, and few of those who are in it, will make the experiment, and that is the reason why the one is so violent against her, and the other so indifferent to her."

V.

DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE CHURCH.

“ Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.”—
EPH. v. 25.

IN discussing last week “Objections to the Church,” we were concerned with difficulties which were in no way peculiar to the present time, but such as might have suggested themselves to an imperfectly instructed Churchman at almost any period ; to-day we shall be concerned with one which is more directly suggested by the present condition of the English Church. It is impossible for any one to travel at all extensively in England, or even to visit several churches in succession in any large town, without becoming conscious of the fact that the teaching which he hears in each place is very far from being absolutely identical. A careful study of

such teaching as he would be likely to meet with, would gradually impress upon him the conviction that there were no less than three distinct types of thought and methods of teaching, each represented by a comparatively large body of adherents, all, notwithstanding their differences of opinion, claiming to be members of one and the same Church. The difficulty would, no doubt, present itself to his mind, "How can these differences within the Church be reconciled with its claim to be one undivided body; do they not, in fact, constitute an insuperable argument against the validity of such claim?"

The difficulty which this question suggests will form the subject for our consideration to-night. Leaving out of consideration the eccentricities of teaching and practice on the part of unworthy members, the responsibility for which the Church would neither claim nor accept, there are, as we have suggested, three distinct schools of thought so largely represented, that the Church could not, even if she would, disclaim all responsibility for their teaching. There are three expressions in common use which, though to a large extent

meaningless and unsuitable, will still serve to give us a rough idea of what is meant by these three schools of thought. The expressions are High Church, Low Church, and Broad Church. A brief review of the history of the Church of England from the time that these expressions came to be first used, will, I think, enable us to grasp the significance of the expressions themselves, and at the same time to understand the relative importance of the schools of thought to which they are usually applied. Such a review will extend over about one hundred and thirty years.

Seldom, or never, in the past history of our Church had religion reached so low an ebb as about the middle of last century; to us who live in far brighter and happier days it is almost impossible to realize the state of religion throughout the country little more than a century ago. Immorality and irreligion threatened indeed to sweep away the very foundations of society; no Sunday schools as yet existed, no Bible Society nor Home Missions had been established, no system of national education had been conceived, the slave-trade continued unchecked. So great was the dis-

regard of religious ordinances, that we find the Bishop of Oxford (Secker) suggesting to the clergy of his diocese the desirability of having one celebration of the Holy Communion between Whitsun Day and Christmas. A darkness which might be felt brooded over the land. Then it was that in the providence of God there suddenly burst forth from several different centres within the Church a stream of light which was destined never to be extinguished till the darkness which it came to dispel had passed away, we trust to return no more.

We cannot stop to trace even in briefest outline the history of the great revival, which, beginning about thirty years before the close of last century, continued to increase and gain strength till the end of the first thirty years of the present century; we can but just mention the names of two or three of those to whom, under God, the movement was due—names such as Wesley, Whitefield, Fletcher of Madeley (whom Voltaire at once named when challenged to produce a character which he regarded as perfect as that of Christ), and, passing on into the present century, Newton, Romaine, Venn, Scott, and Simeon. The names as they pass before

us in honoured review may at least serve to recall the main outlines of the teaching by which the movement itself was characterized. The value of the individual soul, justification by faith alone, the need of repentance and conversion,—these were the doctrines which formed as it were the watchwords of the great revival. The doctrines themselves were in no sense new, having been expressed for centuries in the Liturgy and Articles of the Church, but during the decline of religion and the general neglect of Church teaching they had been to a large extent lost sight of and forgotten. It was the directness of the appeal to the individual conscience, and the sense of personal sin and personal responsibility which was thereby aroused, that gave to the *Evangelical Revival* its wonderful power, but it was the exclusiveness of this appeal which proved the secret of its final decline. For there came a time in the history of the movement when men began to realize that, important as this teaching in regard to the salvation of the individual was, it was, after all, but half the truth. They came to realize more and more that a large portion of the New Testament, and especially of the Epistles, is

concerned not so much with the salvation of the individual as with the redemption and sanctification of a Church. It was to a feeling such as this, and to men who had been trained to a large extent under the influence of the earlier revival, that the second, which is sometimes called the *Catholic Revival*, was due. The truths which were then brought to light, and which, though expressed or implied in the Prayer-book, had been for a time forgotten, were those relating to the corporate life and the common worship of the Church, and to her divinely instituted sacraments as the bond of union of the former and the highest expression of the latter. The second revival in no way implied the abandonment or depreciation of the special truths which it had been the object of the first to proclaim; so far, indeed, was this from being the case, that the very success of the Catholic revival was due to the fact that the Evangelical had preceded it. For the further and higher truths which relate to the life of a society could only be grasped by those who had understood and accepted the truths which relate to the life of the individual soul. To this second revival, which began about 1835,

and is especially connected with the names of Pusey, Newman, Keble, and Hook, we are indebted not simply for bringing to light forgotten truth, but for the increased spirit of reverence which has made itself felt in almost every Church in the land, even where the teaching has differed most widely from that which especially characterized the movement itself. The careless and irreverent services which are to be met with to-day in a few isolated instances may well serve to accentuate our gratitude towards a movement to which, under God, it is mainly due that what but fifty years ago were the general rule have now become the rare and rapidly vanishing exceptions.

We have so far endeavoured to point out the chief characteristics of the first two movements within the Church of England, to which the terms Low Church and High Church are not infrequently applied, and have seen how the second, without losing sight of the teaching which characterized the first, led men on to the knowledge of truths wider and more important than the first, in proportion as the interests of a society are wider and more important than those of any individual member of the same. There

still remains for our consideration the school to which, especially in more recent time, the name Broad Church has often been applied. This last movement, which is especially associated with the names of Arnold, Maurice, Robertson, Kingsley, and Stanley, began to make itself felt within but a few years of the rise of the second, and has continued to exist side by side with it ever since. The time when the movement first took definite shape was a time of great political and social unrest; suggestions for the reconstitution of society, the redress of social grievances, and the forcible redistribution of wealth were increasing in number and urgency, whilst the influence that the Church seemed capable of bringing to bear upon the world outside appeared to be as steadily decreasing. The men on whom the leadership of the movement devolved felt that one of the greatest dangers which threatened the existence of religion amongst them was the increasing tendency to separate, as by an impassable barrier, things secular from things religious, thereby allowing men to suppose that the Church of Christ had no direct concern with, and no message to deliver to, the opposing

factions by which she was surrounded. Their desire was, first of all, by breaking down the imaginary barrier which seemed to separate the interests of the Church and the people, to claim for the former a voice in all that concerned the welfare and improvement of the latter; and, secondly, to assert, both by teaching and action, that the universal brotherhood taught by Christ, which was to be coextensive with the whole human race, offered the one only solution to the great social problems of their own as of all preceding ages. But, though the leaders of the movement were perhaps in some instances unduly fearful lest men's minds should be distracted by questions relating to their individual salvation, or by those relating even to the welfare of the Church, from those still wider issues which affected society at large, there is no reason whatever for assuming that the Broad Church movement either was or is incompatible with either of the other two, nor does the acceptance of the doctrines taught by the first involve the rejection of any of the essential truths to which the latter witnessed. Rather is it the case that a more careful study of the history of the past will serve to convince us that we could ill have

spared any one of the three. We need them all, and we need them in the order in which the providence of God has given them to us.

Whilst, then, we may thank God with grateful hearts for the clear and emphatic witness which our Church has borne to the necessity of repentance and conversion, as illustrated by the Evangelical revival, and whilst at the same time we gladly recognize and accept her further teaching as to the privileges and responsibilities which are ours as members of the body of Christ, as emphasized in the second or Catholic revival, we cannot but praise God for the distinctive truths relating to His purpose towards the world and all its manifold life revealed through His Church, which this last revival has been permitted to bring forward and to teach.

So far, then, is it from being the case that the "Differences within the Church," which we have been considering to-day, afford an argument against the validity of its claims, that the threefold response which its teaching is thus seen to afford to the wants and aspirations of the individual, of the society, and of the world, provides on its behalf one of the strongest arguments it were possible to conceive.

To sum up, then, the thoughts suggested by our subject to-night, a right appreciation of the differences to be met with in our Church at the present time will result, not in an endeavour on our part to minimize those differences or to regard them as of but slight importance, but rather in a frank recognition of the fact that truth is far too vast to be grasped by any individual mind, and at the same time in a more earnest attempt to seize for ourselves the special lessons which these very differences were intended to teach.

VI.

UNITY—IS IT POSSIBLE? HOW MAY IT BEST BE ATTAINED?

“I pray . . . for them also which shall believe on Me . . . that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe.”
—ST. JOHN xvii. 20, 21.

THE title of the subject which we are to consider to-night is, “Unity—is it possible? How may it best be attained?” The two questions are so far related the one to the other, that upon the answer which we are led to make to the former, must obviously depend that which is to be given to the latter. If, in view of the deeply rooted and widespread dissensions in the Church of Christ, we should be led to conclude that unity is nothing more than a pious aspiration or a beautiful dream, it would be obviously useless to devote attention to any particular

proposal for its realization. How, then, are we to arrive at an answer to the first question, *Is Unity possible?* May we not say that an answer, the most authoritative and final which could be given, is contained for us in the very words of our text? The words form part of a great Intercessory Prayer uttered by Christ in the presence of His disciples on the last night before His death. Looking forward into the future which lay before His Church, He prays (both for those who were already His followers, and for those who should eventually believe as the result of their work), not that they may be taken out of the world, but that they may be kept from the evil of the world; and then, as in the words of our text, He asks that they may all be one, and that through the realization of their unity the outside world may be brought to believe. Remembering, then, by whom this prayer was uttered, and its express reference to the future of the Christian Church, can we bring ourselves to believe that Christ was here praying for that which He knew could never be fulfilled? It is surely impossible to admit such a suggestion even for a moment; and if so, it is to the same extent impossible

to accept the conclusion, no matter how strongly existing facts might seem to support it, that the unity of the Christian Church is incapable of realization.

Passing on, then, to the second part of our question, *How may Unity be best attained?* there are *three different suggestions* which have from time to time been made, and which are worthy of being considered by us.

The *first*, the simplest of the three, is this—that inasmuch as it is hopeless to reconcile or remove the differences which separate Christians from one another, we should simply *agree to differ*, and whilst carefully refraining from interfering with each other's creed, should confine our attention to those whose opinions are identical with our own. Is not, however, the admission that there is nothing better for us than to agree to differ, virtually equivalent to an admission that, as far at any rate as we are ourselves concerned, the fulfilment of Christ's prayer is an impossibility? For His prayer, uttered as it was on behalf of ourselves, as well as of all other Christians, alike in the present and in the past, was not that His followers should agree to differ, but that they should

agree to unite ; nay, more, that their union one with another might be as close as the union between Himself and the Father. To agree to differ on points of such vital moment as many of those are which separate the various Christian bodies from each other, would mean to agree to regard as non-essential some of the most fundamental articles of the Christian faith. A unity so obtained would be as ineffective as it would be unreal.

The *second suggestion*, one to which we have already alluded, is perhaps the commonest and most plausible of all which have been made. It would find expression in words such as these: "Seeing that a large number of the differences which separate professing Christians from one another relate to matters which are, after all, of but minor importance, would it not be possible to put these differences on one side, and accept as a basis of agreement, and so of unity, those points on which all Christians are, agreed?" The two objections which, as we have already seen, are fatal to the acceptance of this proposal are, first, the verdict of past experience is clear and unmistakable that an attempt to promote union on such a basis,

whatever the momentary result may appear to be, means eventually the addition of one to the three hundred or more already existing denominations, a large number of which actually started by calling themselves undenominational. The second and still more fatal objection is, that to agree to put aside even for a moment, or to regard as unimportant, the points in dispute, would involve the abandonment of the greater part of the New Testament, for there is scarcely any important or distinctive truth which is not controverted by one or more of the three hundred existing denominations. Better would it be to abandon all hope of unity in despair, than seek to secure such a superficial unity by the compromise of truth.

There is, however, still a *third method* which it is possible to suggest whereby unity amongst Christians might be secured. Instead of endeavouring to discover the small residue of truth which all alike agree to hold, may we not rather go back to the time before any of these three hundred denominations came into existence, and agree to hold the truth which Christians held in common for so many centuries before all our unhappy divisions occurred? We need remain

in no doubt whatever as to what such common belief was, for in the good providence of God there have been preserved to us works of Christian writers without a single break of even as much as twenty years from the time when the New Testament was completed for several succeeding centuries. If, therefore, we believe in any degree whatever in the fulfilment of Christ's promise to His followers that the Spirit should be given to guide them into all truth, we are surely wise in looking to the time when the voice of Christendom was still unanimous, in order to discover what that form of doctrine was which the whole undivided Church was led by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to adopt. It is quite true that during the comparative darkness of the Middle Ages doctrines were taught and practices introduced which we believe to have been contrary to the spirit of the New Testament and of early Christianity; but our Church, so far from denying this, expressly recognized the fact at the time of the Reformation, the principle on which she then acted being to reject everything which could not be shown to be in accordance with the spirit of the New Testament as interpreted by the early undivided Christian

Church. In looking forward into the future, and in view of the steadily increasing number of sects and denominations in our midst, we believe that the only means by which any unity worthy of the name can be secured, is by the recognition of the principle to which we have just referred, which involves the acceptance of all doctrines which can either be proved directly from the New Testament, or which, being in no wise contrary to its spirit, can be shown to have been accepted by the whole Christian Church prior to the time when its first divisions arose. The acceptance of this principle, whilst it will prevent the Churchman from surrendering, even for the sake of securing apparent unity, the very smallest portion of the truth which he has received as a legacy from his forefathers, will in no way prevent his appreciating the good which he may see in others, no matter how widely they differ from himself. Nay, the more fully he understands the teaching of his own Church, the more capable will he be of recognizing the distorted fragments of that teaching which he may find elsewhere. Instead of regarding as his enemies those who disagree with him, or spending his time in denouncing their errors, he

will thank God for the earnestness and self-denial which he sees outside the Church no less than for that which he sees within it. Nor, again, will his sympathies be confined merely to his own branch of the Catholic Church, or to those who have separated themselves therefrom ; he will sympathize with every movement which tends to hasten the reunion of the Universal Church, and to break down the barriers which separate its various branches, more especially when such movement is connected with the quickening into renewed life the spiritual energies of any individual branch. There is, indeed, scarcely any more encouraging sign that the prayer of Christ for the unity of His Church will yet be fulfilled than the desire for closer sympathy, if not for actual reunion, which has been manifested within recent years by branches of the Catholic Church with which for centuries we have had little or no intercourse. Last year it was my privilege to be sent by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in response to an appeal which had been received from the Armenian Church in Cilicia and Cappadocia (the scene, as you will remember, of some of St. Paul's earliest labours), asking that teachers might be sent

from England to open a school for the training of Armenian priests, the special object of such training being to fit them for their future work as teachers and preachers in their own Church. If, as seems likely, it is found possible to provide the help which has been asked for, a link of connection will thus be established between our Church in England and one of the oldest Churches in the world, numbering in all five or six million members, which will do more to remove misunderstandings and render possible an approach to reunion than perhaps anything which has taken place for centuries past.

What we need, both as individuals and as a Church, is to realize more fully the surpassing importance of the subject of reunion. If, as we believe, to the lack of Christian unity in the past is due the continued existence of heathenism in the world, and if, as the words of our text would seem to imply, the conversion of the world will be delayed until this unity be attained, it follows that there is no subject which can possibly engage our attention of such urgent and supreme importance as the subject of Christian unity. But some one is perhaps ready

to exclaim, "Important though the consideration of the subject may be from an abstract point of view, does not the history of the last half-century, during which the sects and denominations here in England have more than quadrupled, render the actual realization of this wished-for unity, at any rate within our time, little short of impossible?" Our answer to such a question is, Yes, it is and must remain so, unless we believe that what God has done in the past He can do in the future. Admitting such to be the case, we are not left to mere conjecture as to how the unity of the Christian Church might conceivably be accomplished. For the past history of the Church affords at least one example of the way in which the barriers which separate men from one another, barriers as seemingly insuperable as those of race and language, suddenly disappeared, when the descent of the Spirit of God, as it had been a rushing mighty wind, resulted in the fusion into visible unity of no less than three thousand men, including Parthians and Medes, Cretes and Arabians, Jews and Gentiles. We believe that whenever the unity for which Christ prayed comes to be realized amongst ourselves, it will

be due to the same power to which its first realization was due. Let the same Spirit descend as of old upon the Church, and under its all-constraining influence the obstacles which appear so insuperable to-day will disappear as suddenly and as effectually as they did of old. As, then, we desire to hasten the reunion of the Christian Church, and through it the conversion of the world, let us pray both more earnestly and more expectantly that the power of the divine Spirit may be manifested in our midst; and, that our prayers be not contradicted by our action, let us search and examine ourselves lest the inconsistency of our lives, or our want of charity in dealing with others, should delay even for an hour the manifestation of the Spirit's power, and so involve us in responsibility for the existing discord. To close, then, with a single practical suggestion as to our own individual duty, in view of the dissensions amongst Christians which threaten to undermine the very foundations of the faith, we would say, Be true to the Church of which in virtue of your baptism it is your privilege to be a member, strive to understand her teaching more thoroughly, misrepresent her not by running into extremes,

pray for her, labour for her, and you will thereby do more to bring about the unity for which Christ prayed, and, through it, the conversion of the world, than in any other way it were possible to suggest.

THE END.









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